



Bluebird fledglings nestle together as they wait for Mom or Dad to bring their next meal. Photo courtesy of: Bill Wehland

2012. A Year In Review

2012 was a busy year for MBS. In addition to our participation in the Bluebirds Forever Festival at Black Hill Regional Park, we also hosted our 6th Annual Membership meeting and picnic. MBS members Anne Sturm and Matt Storms were voted back to the Board of Directors, our web site got a much needed facelift and our Facebook page gained some regular followers as we reached out to help our fellow bluebird enthusiasts.

So, what's in store for 2013? The short answer is plenty! On March 9, 2013, from 1 to 4 p.m. MBS will participate in an Eastern Shore Bluebird Festival at the Ward Museum in Salisbury. The event will include an afternoon of bluebird art, crafts, music and much more. For more information, visit www.wardmuseum.org.

A walk of the bluebird trail at Antietam National Battlefield in Sharpsburg, MD is tentatively scheduled for late April.

The Bluebirds Forever Festival (aka Fiesta Day) will be held on Sunday, May 19th from 1 to 4 p.m. at Black Hill Regional Park.

If you know of some bluebird events scheduled for your area, please let us know so that we can post them on the events page of our web site, www.mdbluebirdsociety.org.

DID YOU KNOW THAT you can renew your membership to MBS quickly and easily by visiting our web site at www.mdbluebirdsociety.org and clicking on the JOIN US page? Renewal notices were recently sent out but if you are not sure if your membership is current, you can check by e-mailing MBS Treasurer Diane Seward at trina65@verizon.net

The President's Perch

by Kathy Kremnitzer

The older we get, the faster time passes. This has been a favorite saying of my grandmother's for many years and she, of all people, should know. Gram will celebrate her 98th birthday in 2013. For me, her words are a reminder that I need to focus more on what is really important to me instead of just getting things done. Let me explain.

Nesting season is a much-anticipated time of the year for me. I look forward to checking my boxes every week to see what surprises await me. However, since the majority of my trails are not where I live, I have a tendency to combine monitoring visits with other errands or activities. Might as well grocery shop, get my hair done and meet a friend for coffee while I'm in town, right? Makes sense, I guess, to conserve gas, time, etc., and while this is not a bad idea, I often leave myself so short on time that I don't take the opportunity to do much more on the trails than is necessary. I check the nestboxes and record my observations, make repairs as needed and then am off to the next box. I can honestly recall mentally congratulating myself more than once for getting all the boxes on one trail done in record time so I could move to the next trail.

Now, you might be asking yourself what's the problem with this scenario. I suppose there's nothing wrong with it except that once nesting season is over I often find myself looking back and asking where it went! So, this year I am planning a different strategy. I am shifting my priorities. When I first began monitoring nestboxes, it was a main focus for me. I chose times when the parks were not filled with the noise and activities of others. I found a quiet spot to sit and absorb the peace and tranquility of being outside in nature. I let the breeze soothe my spirit and listened to the sounds of the Earth. I connected, and in doing so, found a balm so powerful that it carried me through the hustle and bustle of the rest of my busy life. This was a form of therapy for my psyche that I could look forward to each week.

Most of us simply try to do too much and, as a result, what we really love gets lost or, at the very least, diluted. I am taking back the peace and joy for myself. During these cold months of winter I am going to spend some time preparing my monitoring notebook for the 2013 nesting season. I will reflect on my hurried notes from last year and vow that this year's notes will not be as cryptic. When nesting season arrives, I will take a photo or two of those adorable baby tree swallows instead of trusting the vision to my memory. I will sit on that hill in the park, listen to the song of the bluebirds that I love so much, gaze at the mountains in the distance and allow myself to feel the healing power that is Mother Nature.

I hope you will, too.

THE BLUEBIRDS OF ANTIETAM

By Mark Raabe

This year, my wife, Jean, and I submitted our 2012 Eastern Bluebird nesting box report to Antietam National Battlefield, as we have done for thirty-four years. We reported 574 bluebird fledglings, bringing our total to 8,819 since we began this recovery effort in 1979.

We have been asked how we first got involved in bluebird conservation and how we came to establish the nest box trail on this beautiful national parkland near Sharpsburg, Maryland. It all began in 1970, when we purchased a small weekend cabin located along Antietam Creek across from Antietam National Battlefield. At that time, we lived in an apartment in Alexandria, Virginia, and this mostly wooded property with a small meadow and creek frontage provided us with an opportunity to enjoy our interests in nature and gardening. We both grew up in rural Minnesota, among its lakes and prairies, and we shared the Common Loon and the Western Meadowlark as our favorite birds.

Up to that time, neither of us had seen a bluebird. Then, one cold wintry morning in February of 1973, Jean looked out the cabin window and observed (and immediately identified) a bluebird perched on a nearby bare branch. It was an unforgettable experience – a male bluebird reflecting intense coloring in the clear bright sunshine of a brilliant blue sky. Sometime later, when learning of Thoreau's description of "the bluebird carrying the sky on its back", and reflecting back on our first sighting, we agreed wholeheartedly.

We were aware that bluebirds were uncommon but we needed to know more. Some quick research led us to Dr. Larry Zelany, a retired government scientist, living in College Park, Maryland. He spent years studying and writing about declining bluebird populations and we found him through an article he had written about the plight of the bluebird in the then *Purple Martin News*. When I reached Larry, I discovered a gentle, patient, and unassuming individual who delighted in listening to our questions and providing feedback and guidance on any issue relating to bluebirds. He quickly became our bluebird mentor.

I built a couple of nesting boxes according to Larry's specifications and placed them in the small meadow near our cabin. In our first nesting season, we had two broods and fledged five bluebirds. We sought advice from Larry periodically and reported on our results. We added nest boxes over the next five years and before we knew it we had more than one hundred fledglings in our own neighborhood.

Meanwhile, Dr. Zelany was busy sounding the alarm. By some estimates, eastern bluebird populations were down 90% or more. In 1976, he authored the definitive treatise, *The Bluebird, How You Can Help Its Fight for Survival*, published by Indiana Press. Then, the June 1977 issue of *National Geographic Magazine* carried his article, *Song of Hope for the Bluebirds*, and it stimulated such widespread interest that a group of colleagues gathered around Larry, as the Founder, and The North American Bluebird Society (NABS) was formed.

The charter meeting of NABS was held in Silver Spring, Maryland in the Fall of 1978. Bluebird pioneers, like Dr. Zelany, who had also chronicled bluebird decline, and others who had become aware of the problem and wanted to be involved, came from across the United States and Canada. Chan Robbins of *Birds of North America* was the featured speaker. We attended the meeting and met the early leaders, including Mary Janetos, long-time Executive Director, who housed NABS in her Silver Spring, MD, home for many years, Chuck Dupree, long-time Treasurer, and Anne Sturm, all Marylanders. Anne has continued to be a force in bluebird recovery both in Maryland and in NABS.

We came away from the interesting presentations and discussions of that day with a discovery that had a profound and lasting impact on our lives. We realized that within a couple of miles of our cabin lay a proverbial "gold mine" of prime bluebird habitat – Antietam National Battlefield – a seemingly advantageous place for locating nest boxes.

Soon after the charter meeting, we approached the U.S. Park Service at Antietam and they were receptive to our proposal to establish a nesting box trail. Antietam National Battlefield is a beautifully preserved battlefield park and our mostly cedar boxes weather inconspicuously on the rail fences. We started with forty some boxes and fledged 136 bluebirds in 1979, the first year on the battlefield.

In November 1979, *Parade Magazine* carried an article by Joan Rattner Heilman, *How You Can Hear the Bluebird's Song Again*, written in consultation with Larry Zelany. Readers were asked to send a self-addressed envelope and 25 cents in return for nest box plans and the full-color brochure, *Where Have All the Bluebirds Gone?* Approximately 60 mail bags of responses to the article were delivered to bluebird headquarters in Mary's home and about 80,000 return responses were sent out from NABS. Bluebird recovery of all three species was underway.

Our battlefield trail grew quickly to approximately one hundred nest boxes, twenty of which are paired to accommodate tree swallows. In recent years, Antietam neighbors, Judy and John Lilga, have provided wonderful assistance in monitoring the nest boxes. We report trail results to the Park Service at Antietam annually.

We are grateful to the Park Service for its longstanding support and encouragement in this conservation effort. As we care for the nest box trail, we are ever mindful of the high privilege we have of carrying on this work on these beautiful and hallowed grounds, seemingly even more special in this 150th Anniversary Year of the Battle at Antietam.



BLUEBIRDS FOREVER!

Bonnie Bell

Two young children's eyes grew wide at the sight of the tiny new life. The children's mouths opened in amazement as they looked first at the bald hatchling, then at the monitor, then at their parents, and finally back at the baby bird. Are they really seeing this wonderful baby bird? The bird's parents did fly-by missions to watch that their baby came to no harm during the inspection. After their brief but exciting visit to a nest box, the monitor advised the visitors to back away from the box slowly, so they wouldn't miss seeing the parent bird fly back into the box to make sure that all was well with the brood of four nestlings. These children will remember all their lives the first time they saw a real wild baby bird.

This was just one of many scenes of discovery and joy that occurred during the annual Bluebirds Forever Festival at Black Hill Regional Park on Sunday, May 20th, 2012. Children were treated to storybook readings about Bluebirds in the shady flower garden, with the babbling of the waterfall on one side and birdsong from avian visitors to the bird feeders on the other. Students from Yellow Springs Elementary School's Bluebird Club performed their play called "Quest for a Nest" to an appreciative audience on the lawn. At one point the audience was treated to a Bluebird serenade from a nearby perch. Inside the Visitor Center craft tables were set up for young and old to make a Bluebird themed craft to take home.

Adults were treated to several informational sessions, starting with an introduction to the rewarding experience of providing a home for "Beautiful Bluebirds" by MBS board member Ed Escalante. Judy Lilga presented a history of the Bluebird Trail that she monitors on the Antietam National Battlefield. Master Gardener Catherine Callaghan discussed "Native Grasses and Planting for Wildlife". "The Joy of Nature Photography" included a beautiful slide show presentation by wildlife photographer Eric Skrzypczak. Many of Eric's stunning photographs were taken on location at Black Hill Regional Park. Examples of his work can be seen at the visitors' center and at his website, <http://www.wildlifehobbies.com>.

The Maryland Bluebird Society, North American Bluebird Society, Friends of Black Hill Nature Programs and the Naturalists on staff at the Park spent the day answering questions from the over 400 visitors. Black Hill's residents Bluebirds put in timely appearances around the visitors center and at the feeding platform off the observation deck, delighting crowds of admirers. The public was entertained and informed about our fine blue-feathered friends. You couldn't ask for a nicer way to spend a sunny spring afternoon!



MBS's Baltimore County Coordinator Matt Storms posted this photo of a female snapping turtle on our Facebook page last year. He reports, "I don't see this everyday on my trail, but I did on this morning's nest checks. She was moving pretty fast, in search of nice place to lay her eggs. The Snapping turtles seem to be right on time every year, always the first week of June. Wishing her well! This is one nest I won't be monitoring. LOL! I did monitor one a few years ago and it took nearly 60 days for the 30 + eggs to hatch. "

Maryland Bluebird Society's County Coordinators

MBS's County Coordinator Program is an important aspect of what our society is all about, helping bluebirders throughout the state when troubles arise. These volunteers accept phone calls and e-mails and are ready to assist with information and resources on the spur of the moment. Do you need help figuring out how to set up your nestbox? Maybe you have an abandoned nesting and don't know why. Perhaps house sparrows are plaguing your neighborhood and you don't know what to do. Well, an MBS County Coordinator is always willing to listen and share whatever knowledge and experience they can with you.

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If you do not see your county in the above listing it is because we do not have a volunteer from your county. Please contact us if you would like to serve as County Coordinator from your area of our beautiful state.

Nesting News from Around the State

MBS *Worcester County* Coordinator, **Janice Ward**, reports the following 2012 nesting data from the Nasswango Bluebird Trail:

From 38 nestboxes, 156 bluebirds fledged, 44 tree swallows fledged, 9 Carolina Wrens fledged.

At the Cedartown Bluebird Trail, from 14 nestboxes, 83 bluebirds fledged, 13 tree swallows fledged. Janice notes that The Cedartown trail has one box that always has white eggs (nestbox fidelity) and the Nassawango Trail had an unusual number of tree swallow young found dead in the nest, with no sign of trauma.

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Diane Seward of *Montgomery County* reports fledging 27 bluebirds and 5 chickadees for the 2012 nesting season. The extreme heat of June and July led to the loss of some nestlings, though some were also lost to predation.

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Anne Sturm, also of *Montgomery County*, reports the following totals:

Linden Farm Trail, 10 nestboxes (2 went unused the entire nesting season) 35 bluebirds fledged, 17 tree swallows fledged.

From her home trail, 6 nestboxes (1 went unused), tree swallows had 2 successful nestings with all young fledged but no accurate count. Bluebirds fledged 28 young. Anne has experienced great success with the slot and modified slot design nestboxes.

Of the Stella's Dream trail's 27 boxes, 11 went unused. 79 bluebirds were successfully fledged along with 4 nestings of tree swallows (no accurate totals).

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MBS Past President **Ed Escalante** reports that 2012 was the best nesting season he has experienced in the 16 years he has been monitoring the trail at Little Bennett Regional Park in *Montgomery County*. 119 bluebirds fledged from the trail's 32 boxes.

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Matt Storms of *Baltimore County* reports fledging 45 bluebirds, 4 chickadees and 4 tree swallows from the 15 nestboxes he monitors. He experienced some damage to nestboxes and equipment during the summer's derecho, found an owl pellet on top of one of the nestbox baffles and saw 2 snapping turtles laying eggs while making his monitoring visits.

Kathy Kremmitzer reports that her trails in *Frederick and Washington Counties* fledged 101 bluebirds and 113 tree swallows from the 31 nestboxes she monitors.

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Jay Jones of *Montgomery County* fledged 44 bluebirds from his 16 nestboxes.

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David Gillum of *Anne Arundel County*, monitors 2 trails and reports the following results:

From 67 nestboxes, 180 bluebirds fledged, 4 tree swallows fledged, 9 chickadees fledged. 3 of the nestboxes had 3rd nestings and 1 box was destroyed by a falling tree during the derecho.

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The Tuscarora Creek Trail in *Frederick County* is managed by **John and Dedra Salitrik**. Their 10 nestboxes fledged 15 bluebirds. Several clutches of eggs were lost as snakes were able to breach installed predator baffles.

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Chuck Wilson and Lutie Semmes of *Frederick County* fledged 89 bluebirds from 14 of the trail's 31 nestboxes located at Buckingham's Choice. 5 of the trail boxes fledged 2 broods apiece. This year's total surpasses the best of the trail's previous 9 years

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Tricia Smucker reports fledging 52 bluebirds and 52 tree swallows from the Heritage Farm Park trail she monitors in *Frederick County*. 28 bluebird nestlings were lost due to extensive rain and/or extreme heat. The Fountain Rock Park trail fledged 13 bluebirds.

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Bonnie Bell of *Montgomery County* reports the following results from the 2012 nesting season:

Trail size: 11 nestboxes, bluebirds fledged: 33

Tree Swallows: 21 fledged Chickadees: 3 fledged

House Wrens: 6 fledged

Bonnie plans to install predator baffles on her nestboxes in an effort to alleviate snake predation next season.

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The **Evans Family** of *Frederick County* fledged 9 bluebirds from 4 nestboxes this year. The house sparrows were relentless, removing bluebird eggs that were near to hatching and also killing 2 adult chickadees inside the nestbox. The family plans to invest in an in-box trap for nest season.

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Judy and John Lilga fledged 65 bluebirds from their *Washington County* trail's 16 nestboxes. This was the highest total in the history of the trail.

Dear MBS Members:

Please check with MBS Treasurer Diane Seward trina65@verizon.net to be certain you are current with your membership. You can renew using the form below or online at www.mdbluebirdsociety.org

If you know of someone who is interested in bluebirds, please feel free to pass this newsletter on to them.

THE MARYLAND BLUEBIRD SOCIETY, INC. MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Mail to: Maryland Bluebird Society
10809 Rock Run Drive
Potomac, MD 20854

Instructions: Print and complete this application and mail to the above address. Please remember to enclose your check payable to the Maryland Bluebird Society. Memberships and donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

New Application Renewal Application

Note: Membership is effective for the calendar year (s) in which the dues are paid, except that dues paid in the fourth calendar quarter are effective for the year in which they are paid. Please check the appropriate membership category:

Individual One year - \$10.00 Three years - \$25.00

Household One year - \$15.00 Three years - \$40.00

Lifetime: Individual - \$250.00 Household - \$300.00

Student – age 23 or under One year - \$7.00 Three years - \$20.00

Corporate/non-profit One year - \$30.00 Three years - \$85.00

Corporate sponsor (non-voting) One year - \$100.00

Make a tax deductible donation, amount \$_____

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Name: _____

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